



### THE TIME TO SEE IS NOW.

Syphilis is concentrated in a small number of counties, most of them urban or in the South.

The Syphilis Elimination Effort (SEE) is a national initiative bringing together health care providers, policy makers, and community leaders to drive down syphilis rates in the United States.

### WE ALL NEED TO SEE.

To fight syphilis, SEE needs the support of health care providers, members of community-based organizations, religious leaders, policy makers, and activists. That means increased screening efforts by health care providers; making syphilis education a part of community health programs; and informing policy makers and other community leaders that steps toward eliminating syphilis need their support and action today.

**SYPHILIS ELIMINATION WILL ONLY WORK IF YOU AND OTHERS LIKE YOU ARE INVOLVED. WE CANNOT LET THIS CHANCE SLIP AWAY.**

### SEE A BETTER FUTURE.

By working together through the Syphilis Elimination Effort NOW, we can:

- Reduce a glaring racial disparity in our nation's overall health
- Decrease the spread of HIV
- Improve infant health (by reducing the risk of mother-to-child transmission of syphilis)
- Strengthen our public health system, which is more important than ever for our nation's health and well-being
- Reduce health care costs

For more information, visit [www.cdc.gov/std/see/](http://www.cdc.gov/std/see/).

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES  
CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION



A community-based effort to eliminate syphilis in the United States.

**SYPHILIS IN THE UNITED STATES:  
THE FACTS**





## WHAT IS SYPHILIS?

Syphilis is a sexually transmitted disease caused by a bacterium.

## HOW IS SYPHILIS SPREAD?

It is most often passed from person to person through direct contact with a syphilis sore or lesion during vaginal, anal, or oral sex. Although less common, syphilis can be passed from person to person during foreplay, even when penetration does not take place. It can be spread sexually even when no symptoms of the disease are present.

## WHAT ARE THE SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF SYPHILIS?

The primary and secondary stages of syphilis are the most infectious.

- The primary stage of syphilis begins with the appearance of one or more sores called chancres at the site of infection (most often in the genital area). The chancres are painless and usually heal on their own in about 3 – 6 weeks.
- If left undiagnosed and untreated, the disease then progresses into the second stage marked by the development of a rash on the palms of the hands or on the soles of the feet. The rash does not itch. Sometimes the rash is so faint it is unnoticeable. Because of such symptoms, it is possible to have syphilis and not know it.



Second-stage symptoms may also include fever, sore throat, and headaches. Once the second-stage symptoms disappear, the disease progresses into the latent stage that may lead to damage of the cardiovascular and neurological systems. This damage may eventually lead to death.

## CAN A NEWBORN GET SYPHILIS?

Yes. A pregnant woman with syphilis can pass the disease to her baby.

## HOW IS SYPHILIS DIAGNOSED?

Only a blood test analyzed in a laboratory and an examination by a health care provider can confirm whether someone has syphilis.

## WHAT IS THE LINK BETWEEN SYPHILIS AND HIV?

The genital sores caused by syphilis make it easier to transmit and get HIV infection sexually because they can bleed easily, increasing the infectiousness of and susceptibility to HIV. There is a 2- to 5-fold increased risk of getting HIV infection when syphilis is present.

## IS THERE A CURE FOR SYPHILIS?

Yes. Varying dosages of penicillin or other antibiotics are effective in treating syphilis.

## HOW CAN PEOPLE PROTECT THEMSELVES AGAINST INFECTION?

Syphilis prevention methods (or strategies) can include abstinence, monogamy, i.e., being faithful to a single sex partner, or using condoms consistently and correctly. These approaches can avoid risk (abstinence) or effectively reduce risk for getting syphilis (monogamy, consistent and correct condom use).

## PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SYPHILIS – COUNTIES AND INDEPENDENT CITIES BY NUMBER OF REPORTED CASES: UNITED STATES, 2003.\* Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

Rank <sup>†</sup>	County/Independent City	Cases	Rate per 100,000 people
1	Los Angeles County, CA	523	5.3
2	San Francisco County, CA	332	43.5
3	Cook County, IL	302	5.6
4	Fulton County, GA	298	36.1
5	New York County, NY	273	17.6
6	Wayne County, MI	205	10.0
7	Harris County, TX	196	5.5
8	Dade County, FL	194	8.3
9	Broward County, FL	179	10.5
10	Dallas County, TX	165	7.2
11	Baltimore (City), MD	153	24.0
12	Maricopa County, AZ	132	4.0
13	Franklin County, OH	116	10.7
14	Kings County, NY	114	4.6
15	San Diego County, CA	111	3.8
16	DeKalb County, GA	108	16.0
17	Philadelphia County, PA	98	6.6
18	Essex County, NJ	76	9.5
19	Shelby County, TN	76	8.4

\* Accounting for 50% of reported primary and secondary syphilis cases.

† Counties were ranked in descending order by number of cases.

Genital ulcer diseases like syphilis can occur in both male and female genital areas that are covered or protected by a latex condom, as well as in areas that are not covered. Correct and consistent use of latex condoms can reduce the risk of syphilis only when the infected area or site of potential exposure is protected.